

Party Crises in Nigeria: A Threat to Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Conflict is inevitable in every institution especially when issues of political power are a concern but the ability to manage and prevent it from causing harm to social life matters a lot. The paper examined party crises in Nigeria's political system and their implications on sustainable development. The evaluation of the height of party crises in the Nigerian political environment which was solely based on data derived through observation and secondary sources among scholars in different walks of life as rightly expressed in media, as well as strong confirmation of party conflict in Nigeria, is an indication that the party crisis in the country is mammoth and escalating and would not stop if nothing is done about it. The political parties in Nigeria have witnessed incessant intra-party conflicts and this does not augur well in a country seeking sustainable development. Therefore, the need to explore the topic with solutions is very necessary. The study uses content analysis to conclude. To ensure that the existing party crises become a thing of the past, there should be regular and timely meetings among the party executives to discuss issues. This will help to track every arising conflicting factor beforehand. The established rules and regulations of the party should be strictly adhered to and clear. The paper also recommends for parties to shun every form of dictatorship within the party, and godfatherism, which lead to frequent defection and killings. It is concluded that Nigeria can ensure sustainable development on grounds that there is peace, cooperation, leading to unity and growth among members of the political party. When these are far at hand, the result may lead to a divided society in the long run.

Keywords: Party Crises, Sustainable Development Goals, Political Party, Party Dictatorship, Nigeria

Introduction

The role of a political party in every democratic nation is important because of the issue of peace, security, and control of economic resources. Nigeria is a democratic nation with over 68 political parties in the country. Being a developing country bequeathed with abundant human and natural resources, the population was estimated to be 206 million people (World Bank, 2020). The pursuit to improve people's lives and protect the planet for future generations that is free from agony, poverty, ethnic and tribal crises, and lack of social amenities has been a target for

sustainable development. Social models of sustainability seek to improve political, cultural, religious, health, and educational systems, among others, to continually ensure human dignity and wellbeing (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Evers, 2018). In exploring the demands of sustainable development, Ukaga et al. (2011) emphasized the need to move away from harmful socio-economic and political activities and rather engage in activities with positive environmental, economic and social impacts. Sustainability according to Daly (1992) encompasses notions of equity, empowerment, accessibility, participation, cultural identity, and institutional stability. Since sustainable development is also about ensuring institutional stability in a country, the need to emphasize stability and crisis management in the Nigerian party system becomes very paramount. This is because intra-party democracy is central to the maintenance of an orderly society in any democracy. It is also a global goal, that every developing nation should make the utmost priority of ensuring a peaceful co-existence.

However, the observed height of the intra-party crisis in Nigeria leading to incessant cross-carpeting, animosity, and quarreling tends to create an increasing disconnect between leaders and the led. It is not unconnected to aver that the situation if persists may lead to a decline in political participation and this does augur well with the target of sustainable development. With the lingering godfatherism since 1999 when the civilian rule took over, there have been problems of internal party democracy resulting in factionalization, decamping, carpet crossing, and defection. Another movement that has progressively become a feature of Nigeria's political culture is a dictatorship (Egboh & Aniche, 2012).

There is no doubt that the lack of internal democracy in the Nigerian political party will generally undermine national development. Odibachi (2010) notes that party politics has shown more crises than solidity for national development such that almost all the political parties have been perpetually trapped in conflicts owing to a lack of internal democracy. The question that borders everyone in Nigeria today is "can Nigerian ensure sustainable development with the existing level of party crises especially, in the ruling party APC?" Are peaceful and inclusive societies achievable?

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to provide a synthesis of existing knowledge on party instability by integrating different explorations and to propose a strategy for managing party member crises for achieving sustainable development. In the following sections, the paper examines first, the background of the problem, to give the paper an understanding of the problem. Secondly, the paper attempted to give illumination on the concept of the political party and the concept of sustainable development, and the causes of intra-party instability. It is then followed by an exploration of the nexus between party crises in Nigeria and sustainable development.

The research is historical and exploratory in design, therefore, depended on the secondary source and qualitative analysis. The secondary Source of data collected was adopted to produce relevant data for the understanding of this study. Data generated from secondary sources were analyzed based on content analysis. Finally, following the public interest in sustainable development, the

writers proposed a way forward to the management of party members' crises in Nigeria.

Clarification of Concepts

Political Party

It is not unconnected to state that every nation that practices democracy has invariably necessitated for a political party. It is also not off-point to clearly state that for people to be elected in government as representatives, there is a need for a platform under which this can be vehemently achieved. This calls for a political party. According to Amuji (2011), a political party is an association of people, who plan to win the election, and as a result, direct the affairs of the government of a given state. The author went further to narrow it down as a formally organized association with a clear purpose of acquiring the legal control of the government of a nation. For Nnoli (2003:207), a political party is defined as a group of people who share a common conception of how and why state power should be organized and used. Nwankwo (1997) opined that a political party is an organized group of individuals seeking to seize the power of government and to enjoy the benefits to be derived from such control. According to Akindele (2011), a political party is defined as an association of people with similar interests and common purposes. The interest and purposes revolve around the objective of using the party to acquire power and share in its exercise. It has the mobilization roles of educating and recruiting leaders for office." For Adigwe (1974), a political party is defined as a situation where people share a common political philosophy and advocating a distinct style for government, organize themselves into a group or union to promote their philosophy and help to determine how a state is to be governed. In this situation, they are said to have formed a political party. Curtis (1968) stated that:

“(a political) party signifies a group of people who hold certain political beliefs in common or who are prepared to support the party candidates, work together for electoral victory, attain and maintain political power.”

One thing is clear and common about these definitions, that they are an organised group of people seeking to take over or control power with common political beliefs. But what is observed in some Nigerian political parties is no doubt a disorganised group of people with different political beliefs, filled with inter and intra-party crises leading to frequent defection of many party members yet, they are seen as political parties. One may ask; is Nigerian political parties an ideal political party or parties in disguise? There is a need to revisit the concept of an ideal political party in Nigeria.

Sustainable Development

United Nations (2010) defines sustainable development as a situation that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Emas (2015) posited that the overall goal of sustainable development (SD) is the long-term stability of the economic, social, and political environment. The concept of sustainable development according to Aluko (2004) originated from the 1987 report of the World Commission on

Environment and Development (WCED). The report titled “Our Common Future” exposed the cunning deception embedded in the developmental projects often brandished by many governments around the world especially among developing nations which tend to leave a considerable proportion of the population poor and vulnerable and yet degrading the environment. WCED, therefore, concluded that there is the imperative necessity of designing a new development pathway that focuses on the people’s need not just for a few years or few places but globally and for the distant future. It also argues that long term economic development and environmental protection against natural and artificial disasters are inextricably intertwined. Sustainable development according to Odigie and Orobosa (2008) is a development that is human-centered, pro-poor and pro-nature, pro-jobs, and pro-women; it emphasises economic growth that renders quality life to a significant population while securing the environment and guaranteeing empowerment with equality.

All these definitions center on the improvement of human life both present and in the future. But the improvement of human life must follow various processes which are manned or controlled by the members of political parties in power and as such the worst is expected when members of the party are in conflict with themselves.

Causes of Party Crises in Nigeria

To tackle party crises, it is important to understand the causes of party crises from different perspectives. There is no doubt that the struggle for power among party members is one of the causes of the intra-party crisis in Nigeria. It is also not unconnected to state that once the political power has been possessed, economic power is possessed invariably. This makes some party members fight and commit their last drop of blood to win the power thereby, putting people’s lives in jeopardy, because they will not only determine how the scarce resources are utilized but also determine who takes over the government. From the historical perspective, Akindele (2011) stated that: the history of political party formation in Nigeria from the colonial period undoubtedly shows intra-party and inter-party conflicts in the country. In the same line, Egboh and Aniche (2012) opined that Nigerian politics between 1999 and 2011 was not without a lack of internal democracy, incumbency factor, lack of ideological clarity, party fraction, and the cult of personality. This disconcerting inheritance remains the foundation of party politicking and crisis in Nigeria today. According to Onyishi (nd),

“In Nigeria, the courts seem to have joined the political fray with their power of judicial injunctions. At the state level where the judiciary does not enjoy sufficient financial autonomy, the democratic process has been manipulated by the political strong men” who in most cases use the police to beat opponents to submission or defection to another party. The Nigerian police Force so far has proved to be a very loyal tool of the executive arm of government. In the formation of the new PDP by the members of the old PDP, Onyishi (nd) stated that police were used to seal its office and bar its members from functioning in it; this happened when the former speaker of the House of Representatives, Rt Hon. Aminu Tambuwal defected from the PDP to the opposition party (APC) for power in the 2015 General Election., it was the police that did what may be called an

unconstitutional act, dirty job of attempting to prevent him from going into his office”.

Furthermore, factors such as ethnicity, military intervention, pluralistic elite structure, the fragility of the nation’s take-off, corruption, power of incumbency are capable of causing party instability within the context of party politics. It was evident in Anambra state between Dr. Mbadinuju and his godfather Emeka Offor. According to Okeke (2003:93), teachers in Anambra state could not be paid their salaries; primary and secondary schools in the state remained shut for a greater part of each school year while state-owned tertiary institutions operated under poor funding. This was as a result of party conflict.

Another intra-party conflict was recorded in Oyo state, between the former governor Rashidi Ladoja and his political Kingmaker, Chief Lamidi Adedibu. Before Ladoja's emergence as the PDP gubernatorial candidate in 2003, was common knowledge that the "powers that be" in the party did not feel quite comfortable with his candidature (Oyadiran & Toyin, 2016). However, Adedibu maintained that Ladoja be supported and allowed to contest. During the election campaign, Adedibu created an impression on the people that he had total control of Ladoja. However, cracks began to show in their relationship after the election. What precipitated their face-off was the incessant demand made by Adedibu on the list of state executive nominees, members of state parastatals and security votes to the state. This forced Ladoja to remark that "I see governance as service while he (Adedibu) sees it as a business". This account was rendered in (Sunday Tribune, January 15, 2006). It was observed that the crisis later extended to the State House of Assembly which culminated in the impeachment of the governor, see (Oyadiran & Toyin, 2016). This affected the smooth running of the state.

In Edo State, the Governor Godwin Obaseki, announced his resignation from the APC, citing the party’s decision to disqualify him from participating in the June 22, 2020, governorship primary election as his reason. The crisis in the All Progressives Congress worsened when the Court of Appeal sitting in Abuja upheld the suspension of Adams Oshiomhole as the APC national chairman. What went wrong? It was recalled that Justice Danlami Senchi of the FCT High Court had on March 4, 2020, suspended Oshiomhole as APC’s national chairman because the party wrongfully continued to retain him in the office while he was under suspension as a member of the party. The main suit leading to the order earlier suspending Oshiomhole was instituted before the FCT High Court by six applicants, including the Vice-Chairman of the party, North-East, Mustapha Salihu, and the Chairman of the party in Edo State, Anslem Ojezua. (Wednesday Punch, June 17, 2020).

Governor Obaseki and his Deputy Mr. Philip Shaibu’s resignation, just a few weeks before, the Edo state APC primary gubernatorial election broke the party into factions. He said, specifically “I am sure that the whole country knows and is aware of what has gone on with me and the party chairman (Oshiomhole) and the party leadership, which culminated in my disqualification as a governorship aspirant”. “Upon that unfortunate decision by the chairman of the All Progressives Congress, I have decided to go and seek my governorship aspiration on another platform.” Which later became PDP”. It was about inconsistency in the NYSC certificate. According to “Governor Obaseki, in 2016, when he contested governorship election, he could not find the

originals of his certificates because he hadn't required them for more than two decades". "So, he deposed to an affidavit that he couldn't find the originals. Subsequently, he found all the original copies of all his certificates and they were with him. According to Oshiomhole, there is an inconsistency in the National Youth Service Corps certificate where he said that 'i' was missing at the end of my surname. To governor Obaseki, "it was like a cursive, it was written in a cursive manner. So if that is an inconsistency to him, then it's really sad that people of that quality are leading Nigeria's ruling party" (Wednesday Punch, June 17, 2020).

In Oyo state gubernatorial election 2020, the case is not different from Edo. It is crystal clear that effort to ensure sustainable development in a crisis environment is like pouring water on stones and expecting the water to stay. For many politicians, politics is a "battle" and not a "game" by implication, any weapon one can use to win power is what matters thereby, engendering many party members to lack of moral values capable of keeping the candidates fit in a democratic society.

Are these political figures decamping or cross carpeting from one party to another for the interest of Nigerians or their selfish ends? Do they want to build a sustainable development, or are they defecting because their demands and aspirations cannot be actualized in their original party? It is obvious that in spite the height of carpet-crossing in Nigeria, unemployment, poverty leading to banditry, kidnapping and youth restiveness have not be solved.

To sum it up, party crisis could slow the journey towards ensuring sustainable development. Everyone now wants to join the bandwagon than waiting patiently to take over the ruling party through hard work, therefore, is no longer an ideology platform for sustainable development.

Implications of Party Crisis for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

The crisis among the party members in Nigeria and its threat to sustainable development is based on the assumption that there is a nexus between achieving sustainable development and the party crisis. It is unrealistic to think of ensuring sustainable development when the ruling party is in crisis. Sustainable development aims to ensure a safe and healthy environment for all and sundry and to maximize simultaneously national goals, organizational goals, and individual goals that can persist over generations (Achumba, Ighomereho, & Akpor-Robaro, 2013). Party crises tend to create division and victimization among stakeholders this tends to affect development as the focus is thwarted. When political parties performed below the expected integrative functions, enhancing the polity becomes difficult and this by extension will become a threat to sustainable development and loss of focus on governance.

The fact is that with the observed party crisis and lack of internal democracy in Nigeria, our political institutions cannot take or influence the greater participation of the masses in politics. No doubt that before a country can ensure sustainable development, there must be a number of internal sanitation and development among the party members especially the ruling party. According to Basiru (2015), a party crisis in Nigeria if not managed carefully, will institutionalize indiscipline and political vagrancy in Nigeria. Political parties are supposed to be platforms for promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for development, providing access to

justice for all, and building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels but when characterized by tyranny, corruption, undue favoritism, intra, and inter-party crises, does not permit peace, stability, unity, liberalism, and environment for economic development at large because of lack of cooperative effort needed to develop the state. Basiru (2015) avers that the intra-party conflicts had, in many instances, led to the criminalization of political struggles where many politicians were assassinated. Anyone who doubts this assertion should visit Olorungbemi (2014) for insights. Above all, a party crisis tends to create division among members of the society if not destroy their unity.

The way forward

The paper has underscored the causes of crises in party politics and its likely implications on sustainable development in Nigeria, the question is what to do to repress the challenge since sustainable development is to be considered with utmost priority? The answers to the above challenges are not far from us as Nigerians with men and women of intellectual capacity. To subdue the challenges of party crises, they must have the political will to strive for peace which will, no doubt, bring about unity, and with unity, there will be a focus of direction. The power of incumbency and godfatherism which are the major problems confronting Nigerian party politics must be done away with. It is time the antecedent of our political traditions is abandoned and thinks of the future. No practice of the past is too hard to let go of. In other words, internal democracy and ideological clarity should be encouraged with a high sense of priority. We observed the bond between the political mentors and their proteges to deepen the intra-party conflict. The paper, therefore, suggests that the bond between them should be people's oriented not individual-oriented. This will help the public to hold such proteges accountable for any breach of contract. Since conflict is inevitable in an organization whether political or not, parties in conflict should always find a neutral ground for reconciliation bearing in mind the consequences of the crisis on the environment.

Conclusion

Every developing country is striving toward achieving sustainable development and Nigeria is not excluded. A political party is one of the institutions for achieving peace and stability in the country. As an institution of government is bound to face certain challenges which among the challenges is frequent Intra and inter-party conflicts leading to incessant defection of party members. This practice if unattended to, will have a deleterious effect on the democracy, peace, and stability of the country. That is why this paper attempts to give some illuminations on the topic. A strong nation is known for its stability among the ruling party members. It is also understandable that the road to modernization is never rosy and bliss since resources are limited but, finding the most effective ground for reconciliation will no doubt ameliorate the existing party crises in Nigeria.

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